How are UK higher education students' experiencing learning online?

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Listening to our students…

Recommendations from the Office for Students report, ‘Gravity assist: propelling higher education to a brighter future’

- Co-design digital teaching and learning with students at every point in the design process
- Involve students and staff in decisions about the digital infrastructure that will be used and how it will be implemented
- Ensure a strong student voice informs every aspect of strategic planning

Available from https://bit.ly/3eQtdtB
How are you gathering experiences of your students’ online learning?

- Visit www.menti.com
- Enter the code: 4906 5818
- Share your approaches in the word cloud
How are you gathering your students' experiences of online learning?
Digital experience insights

https://digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk

• Our insights surveys provide powerful data on how students, teaching and professional services staff, and researchers, are using technology

• Over 300,000 students and staff from over 250 organisations across FE and HE have participated in our surveys since 2016

• Designed to help to understand and improve the digital experience in FE and HE

• Provide baseline and benchmarking data to inform your digital strategy

• 62,700 student responses to our 2020-21 surveys which focused on the COVID context
Students’ digital experience and environment

- You and your technology
- Technology at your university or college
- Technology in your learning (or teaching, research or role)
- Developing your digital skills

https://digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/what-is-digital-insights-experience/
Listening to our HE students’ voice (Oct – Dec 2020)

https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8318/1/DEI-P1-HE-student-briefing-2021-FINAL.pdf
Theme one – your current learning situation for HE

In the last 2 weeks how have you mainly been learning? (answered between Oct-Dec 2020)

• 1% – physically on site
• 18% – a mix of physically on site and online learning
• 81% – online learning (with the other students on course/shielding/quarantine)
Theme one - Where were HE students learning online?

- 72% – at home, own or family home
- 32% – student accommodation
- 11% – on campus in study spaces, libraries etc
- 3% – off campus in public spaces (eg cafes)
- 1% – I have not been learning online
Theme one - When you’ve been learning online, have any of the following been a problem? - HE students

Q1 (In the last two weeks, how have you mainly been learning?) by (Q4) (When you’ve been learning online, have any of the following been a problem?) - HE students

- No suitable computer/device: 25% Physically on site, 14% A mix of physically on site and online learning, 14% Online learning (either on own or with other learners)
- No safe, private area to work: 31% Physically on site, 19% A mix of physically on site and online learning, 17% Online learning (either on own or with other learners)
- Poor wifi connection: 54% Physically on site, 62% A mix of physically on site and online learning, 60% Online learning (either on own or with other learners)
- Mobile data costs: 28% Physically on site, 22% A mix of physically on site and online learning, 21% Online learning (either on own or with other learners)
- Access online platforms/services: 30% Physically on site, 29% A mix of physically on site and online learning, 27% Online learning (either on own or with other learners)
- Need specialist software: 25% Physically on site, 21% A mix of physically on site and online learning, 19% Online learning (either on own or with other learners)
Theme two: digital platforms and services at your organisation

The percentages of HE students who agreed with various statements about their learning environment were:

- **48%** – reliable (38% neutral, 14% disagreed)
- **42%** – well designed (43% neutral, 16% disagreed)
- **45%** – easy to navigate (36% neutral, 19% disagreed)
- **70%** – safe and secure (27% neutral, 3% disagreed)
- **36% of HE students** agreed they were given the chance to be involved in decisions about online learning (36% neutral, 29% disagreed)
Theme three: technology in your learning

Overall quality of online and digital learning:

- **HE students** were also positive about the quality of online and digital learning on their course overall. 68% of all respondents and 71% of new students rated it as being either ‘best imaginable’, ‘excellent’ or ‘good’

The percentages of **HE students** who agreed with statements about the quality of **online learning materials** were:

- **55% – well designed** (35% neutral, 10% disagreed)
- **36% – engaging and motivating** (41% neutral, 23% disagreed)
- **45% – at the right level and pace** (38% neutral, 18% disagreed)
Theme three: technology in your learning

Range of learning activities – percentage of HE students who said they had carried out the following online learning activities in the last two weeks prior to taking part in the survey were:

- **86%** – live lecture/teaching session
- **84%** – accessed recorded lecture/teaching session
- **81%** – accessed other course materials eg notes, assignments
- **64%** – submitted coursework
- **52%** – online discussion with lecturer
- **49%** – got feedback on their work
- **45%** – interacted with quizzes/games/tests
- **39%** – worked on a group project eg shared report
- **37%** – online research tasks
- **18%** – virtual lab, practical or field work
Theme 4 – your digital skills

Support and guidance

The percentages of HE students who agreed they had received support for learning online and digital skills development were:

- **52%** – support for learning online/away from campus (36% neutral, 12% disagreed)
- **42%** – guidance about the digital skills needed for their course (39% neutral, 18% disagreed)
- **25%** – an assessment of their digital skills and training needs (41% neutral, 34% disagreed)
Theme 4 – your digital skills

Where do HE students go for help with online learning?

- 67% – other students on your course
- 61% – lecturers/tutors
- 46% – online videos and resources
- 33% – friends and family
- 16% – IT/e-learning staff
- 10% – don’t need help
- 7% – library staff
Qualitative themes

In their own words – what HE students are experiencing
What HE students are telling us….

"Online lectures aren't the same as on campus lectures, it's very difficult to stay engaged staring at a screen for 8 hours a day. The best lectures/tutorials are when they are well organised, to the point and cover everything in 45-60 minutes"

"Provide guidance on the best ways to engage with online learning and to be focused.“

"We have over 200 students in a online lecture. Trying to teach 200 students in any environment is not going to be effective.“

"Use bubble groups to teach in online as they are smaller and we have developed a relationship with those students instead of 100+ random students on a online lecture at a time"

"Create support networks and make online lectures more of a social experience with fluid three way communication during classes.“
Positive aspects of online learning

What HE students were saying...

• Lecture recordings make a big difference to students in terms of:
  • **Understanding** – ability to watch/revisit as many times as they would like
  • Being able to vary **pace** (slow down and speed up)
  • **Stop/pause** to facilitate and improve the quality of their **note-taking**
  • **Catch up** if unable to attend live session for any reason
  • Helpful to students for whom **English is not first language**
  • It can be easier to **hear** than in large lecture halls/theatres with less distraction surrounding sound
Positive aspects of online learning

What HE students are saying...

• Live sessions are naturally more interactive and engaging than pre-records because they more easily allow opportunities to ask questions and receive timely responses

• Online learning is perceived as better by some students

• The flexibility and convenience of online learning enables students to schedule their studies around their other commitments (work, family, care) in a less rigid way

• Learning with and from peers is important to students - small group activities work better than larger groups

• Appreciation of effort that has gone into curriculum redesign, communication and support - students acknowledge the efforts of both academic and professional services staff in adapting and supporting students in their online learning
Negative aspects of online learning

What HE students are saying...

- Students are experiencing difficulties in accessing lectures and online resources
- Timeliness, scheduling and timetabling
- Online learning is hard and difficult and can be overwhelming – students report receiving too much work, expectation of larger volume of independent work than usual but without the benefit of timely support
- Difficult to concentrate/focus - too much screen time, some lectures too long, insufficient breaks, intenseness of delivery mode – causes fatigue and mental health concerns
- Communication is an issue - interactions in live sessions can be difficult if class size is large, if don’t know other students
- Isolation and loneliness
What can we do now?

- **Get the basics right** – wifi (on/off campus), access to reliable **hardware** and **software**, clear **navigation** to learning content, **timetabling** and session **scheduling**, **audio** and **lighting** of online sessions

- Make learning sessions **more interactive** (eg quizzes, games, tests), **small group tasks** so students feel **connected** to each other, their course and their university

- **Record lessons** and make them available soon after delivery to aid personal learning preferences, revision and catch up

- **Train** and **support lecturers** to use online tools in a pedagogically sound and inclusive way

- Think about the **pace of delivery** (too fast/too slow) and consider **shorter** bursts and **regular** breaks

- Create opportunities to talk to/ask questions of lecturers and fellow students and give **timely individual and group support**

- **Offer timely feedback** on formative and summative assessment activities
Next steps

Data collection and analysis is continuing...

• Briefings summarising these findings together with full reports are available from https://digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/reports-and-briefings/our-reports/

• Gathered over 62,700 student responses when our surveys closed on the 30 April and is currently being analysed

• Get involved https://digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/subscribe/find-out-more/ to run surveys with your students and staff

• Updates to Jisc NUS roadmap for supporting students to improve their digital experience at university and college for supporting students with learning online
Questions and discussion
Get in touch…

Digital experience insights

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#digitalstudent